

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

Please amend claims 1-3, 8-9, 12, and 14-16, such that the status of the claims is as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a tunneling magnetoresistive head, the method comprising:  
forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier;  
forming ~~[[a]]~~ an air bearing surface of the tunneling magnetoresistive stack;  
ion etching the air bearing surface ~~to cause~~ causing deficiencies of a constituent of the  
tunnel barrier in a portion of the tunnel barrier adjacent the air bearing surface; and  
replenishing at least a portion of the constituent in the portion of the tunnel barrier adjacent  
the air bearing surface.
2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein replenishing the constituent comprises subplanting the constituent into the air bearing surface during ion etching.
3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein replenishing the constituent comprises exposing the air bearing surface to a constituent source after ion etching.
4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier comprises forming a tunnel barrier from a material selected from the group consisting of oxides of Hf, Ta, Nd, Ti, Mg, Al, Y, Zr, and Si.
5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier comprises forming a tunnel barrier of an oxide.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier comprises forming a tunnel barrier of a nitride.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier comprises forming a tunnel barrier of an oxynitride.

8. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein ion etching the air bearing surface and replenishing the constituent occur simultaneously.

9. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a tunneling magnetoresistive head, the method comprising:  
forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier;  
forming [[a]] an air bearing surface of the tunneling magnetoresistive stack; and  
ion etching the air bearing surface in the presence of a constituent source to replenish a  
constituent of the tunnel barrier in a portion of the tunnel barrier adjacent the air bearing surface.

10. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein ion etching the surface in the presence of a constituent source comprises ion etching the surface in the presence of oxygen.

11. (Original) The method of claim 9, wherein forming a tunneling magnetoresistive stack having a tunnel barrier comprises forming a tunnel barrier of an oxide material.

12. (Currently Amended) A method of forming a tunneling magnetoresistive head, the method comprising:  
forming a first ferromagnetic layer;  
forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer, ~~the tunnel barrier;~~

forming a second ferromagnetic layer on the tunnel barrier;  
lapping the first ferromagnetic layer, tunnel barrier, and second ferromagnetic layer to form  
[[a]] an air bearing surface;  
ion etching the air bearing surface to cause ~~causing~~ a deficiency of a constituent of the  
tunnel barrier in a portion of the tunnel barrier adjacent the air bearing surface; and  
replenishing the deficiency of the constituent in the portion of the tunnel barrier adjacent the  
air bearing surface.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein replenishing the deficiency of the constituent comprises restoring at least one electrical property of the tunnel barrier.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, wherein forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer ~~comprising a constituent~~ comprises forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer comprising an oxide.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, wherein forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer ~~comprising a constituent~~ comprises forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer comprising a nitride.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 12, wherein forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer ~~comprising a constituent~~ comprises forming a tunnel barrier on the first ferromagnetic layer comprising an oxynitride.

17. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein ion etching the air bearing surface and replenishing the deficiency of the constituent occur simultaneously.

18. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein replenishing the deficiency of the constituent comprises restoring at least one electrical property of the tunnel barrier adjacent the air bearing surface.

19. (Original) A tunneling magnetoresistive head, formed according to the method of claim 12.